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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000275

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHWEST CHINA: MIGRANT LABOR, DIALECTICS, AND LIES

REF: A. CHENGDU 267

[B](#). CHENGDU 251

[C](#). CHENGDU 249

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: An excursion arranged by an influential Southwest China businessman for some of his employees that ConGenOff was invited to join provided a rare opportunity for informal exchanges on challenges faced in a relatively underdeveloped part of eastern Sichuan Province. Many of the area's residents have left to find work elsewhere. One local official who denied to ConGenOff the existence of arbitrary fee collections from local farmers or restrictions on religious practice later vented about being fed up by "having to tell lies all the time." Local party cadres and some peasants may be getting training increasingly via the Internet. End Summary.

Visiting Neijiang City with Migrant Workers

[1](#)2. (C) ConGenOff recently accompanied a well-connected local business contact and 17 of his workers on a "team building" road trip to Neijiang City at Sichuan Province's eastern border with the Chongqing Municipality. The business contact (strictly protect) is a major real estate investor in the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu and controls a bakery chain, much of the product of which is sourced from local military bases and sold from storefront properties owned by People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel. The two urban districts and three rural counties of Neijiang City have a total population of 4.2 million people and, like most of rural Sichuan, are major exporters of migrant labor to both the China coast and to Chengdu, just two hours away by highway or rail. The bakery employees with whom ConGenOff traveled to Neijiang City were themselves mostly young migrants from different parts of Sichuan province outside the Chengdu area.

Dialectics Protects Against Spiritual Pollution

[1](#)3. (C) According to a local county Party Secretary with whom ConGenOff had the opportunity to speak, Neijiang's Zizhong County has an official population of about 1.2 million people, 300,000 of whom are usually away working in Chengdu or on the coast. The 38-year-old Party Secretary was an administrative dean at a university in Chengdu for eight years before coming to Zizhong. He noted he has never been overseas and that getting official permission these days to travel abroad is increasingly difficult since the government is cracking down on junketeering.

14. (C) Switching into more political jargon, the county Party Secretary said people in China today can talk about new ideas and not be afraid of "spiritual pollution" since a knowledge of "dialectics" makes it easy to hold on to one's own beliefs while discussing the views of others. He also commented it is remarkable the United States has achieved so much in a little over two hundred years, something amazing to Chinese who think of themselves as coming from an old country. When ConGenOff observed that the People's Republic of China has just a 50-year history, the Party Secretary retorted the Chinese Communist Party has a history of over 80 years.

Lies All the Time!

15. (C) A Neijiang City foreign affairs office representative, in response to questions from ConGenOff about restrictions on religious practice, noted religious affairs bureaus work to facilitate worship, not its restriction. The official asserted that ConGenOff's descriptions of restrictions on religious venues in other parts of China could not be true. He also denied that arbitrary collection of fees from farmers is a problem in the Neijiang area. Later that evening, the Chengdu businessman who led the excursion to Neijiang described to ConGenOff how the local official had subsequently vented to him, "What I hate about this job is that I have to tell lies all the time!" According to the businessman, the local official, who is originally from Chongqing, feels very frustrated at having gone several years in a relative backwater like Neijiang without a promotion. The official has only "apparatchik" skills and so feels trapped without any real other employment opportunities.

16. (C) ConGenOff's business contact also commented that people from Chongqing are popularly viewed in China as being relatively straight-talking and it is thus, perhaps, more difficult for officials originally from there to rise up through Party ranks.

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The businessman, also a lawyer who advises companies in Chengdu, observed that people from Chengdu on the other hand tend to be "excessively clever." He mentioned as an example the magnificent new municipal headquarters the Chengdu government was ordered to move out of by central government authorities because it set a bad example of extravagance following the Sichuan earthquake. The city government, however, is quietly disobeying orders and staying put (see ref b).

Confucian Temple and CKS Calligraphy

17. (SBU) Building tourism is one of Neijiang City's current development strategies. According to local officials, the Confucian Temple at Zizhong, restored after severe damage during the Cultural Revolution, has the only statue of a standing Confucius in China because one of Confucius's teachers came from the area. Calligraphy from seven Qing Emperors and Republic of China President Chiang Kai-shek hangs near the statue of Confucius. This calligraphy was protected from marauding Red Guards, who destroyed the original Confucius statue, by pasting Cultural Revolution slogans over the boards.

18. (SBU) Local officials also showed our group an out-of-the-way hillside village restored to look much like it did 50 or 100 years ago in order to attract tourists. One of the buildings had a faded 1958 "Great Leap Forward" slogan painted on it. A landlord's manor house was restored to its 1950 appearance. A sign outside noted that, "after the owner left," the house became state property. When ConGenOff asked about a sign near the entry to the village pointing towards the "Government and Party Cadres Remote Education Room," a Neijiang City official observed that high speed internet connections help villagers learn new skills, especially in the building trades, that can assist them later to find good jobs as migrant workers in other parts of Sichuan or outside the province.

19. (C) Comments: As discussed in ref c, informal conversations with government and party officials can provide some insights into their careers and frustrations they feel as individuals working within the government and party bureaucracy. An issue certainly worthy of further follow up is how the possible return of migrant laborers from the coast (ref a) could impact areas like Neijiang. General background information on Neijiang City can be accessed online at the Neijiang City government website (www.neijiang.gov.cn) and baike.baidu.com/view/25208.htm.
BOUGHNER